

Honorable Ken Calvert
Chairman, Subcommittee on Space and Aeronautics
Committee on Science
U. S. House of Representatives
Opening Statement for Hearing on Implementing the Vision for Space Exploration:
Development of the Crew Exploration Vehicle
September 28, 2006

NASA is undertaking the first steps of an exploration program that will continue over several decades. It will inspire the next generation of scientists and engineers just as Apollo inspired an earlier generation in the '60s. Two major contracts recently awarded are moving us in the right direction. The space shuttle has completed its third flight since the Columbia disaster and we are now on the path to complete the International Space Station.

The Commercial Orbital Transportation Services awards recently have been awarded to SpaceX and to Rocketplane/Kistler. Both entrepreneurial companies are developing a logistics system to service the International Space Station, while on a parallel plane, the Lockheed Martin Company will be developing the Crew Exploration Vehicle, or Orion, to explore the Moon, Mars and beyond.

I applaud NASA for their timely schedule of procurement for this major undertaking. The two procurement announcements are the first of several major procurement award announcements that will be made in order to achieve the Vision for Space Exploration. I am pleased the Committee was the first to endorse the Vision when we unanimously passed the NASA Authorization of 2005 last July. The Congress overwhelmingly passed the Authorization late last year and now NASA is carrying out the will of the Congress.

Many of the overall decisions for the Vision have been made – a capsule approach for the crew vehicle to minimize technical risk and to maximize crew safety; a launch vehicle that builds on the space shuttle technology; an upper stage engine derived from that used on the Saturn V; and a main engine currently used on the Delta IV. It seems that all of these programs contribute to a “knowledge-based” approach, as laid out by the GAO. I believe NASA has a more advanced state of knowledge than the agency has had for many of their earlier procurements. In addition, the NASA acquisition strategy for the Vision is more flexible and has built in incentives, options, and provisions for termination if necessary. The aim is to improve contractor performance.

I know how tight the development budgets will be for this program and am concerned that some of these recommendations could impose delays resulting in substantial cost increases. Congress will continue to exercise its oversight responsibilities on this program, just as we are today. However, we cannot analyze the program to death. We must move forward and stabilize the requirements; maintain a tight design and development schedule to minimize the gap between the Shuttle retirement and an operational Crew Exploration Vehicle; and bring Orion online within the allocated budget.

Page 2.

I know that NASA and its contractors have brought in their best minds to work on this program. We now have an exciting program for NASA to carry out and for our next generation to aspire to be a part of. The decision has been made to move forward and we need to let NASA and the United States lead the world in our exploration of space.

####